

**Chairman Raúl Grijalva
House Committee on Natural Resources
Opening Statement
Full Committee Legislative Hearing on H.R. 5986,
the Environmental Justice For All Act
October 1, 2020**

I want to welcome everyone to this hearing, and thank our witnesses for testifying about one of the most egregious inequities under our current laws: The lack of environmental justice for everyone.

All people have the right to clean air, clean water, and an environment that enriches their lives. For too many, these rights are unrealized, and that discrimination leads to continuous suffering for environmental justice communities.

Communities of color, low-income communities, Tribal and indigenous communities, fossil fuel-dependent communities, and other vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities, children, and the elderly, continue to be disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards.

These hazards include significant exposure to polluted air, waterways, and landscapes.

We also see environmental justice disparities through a lack of equitable access to green spaces, public recreation opportunities, or information on community exposure to environmental hazards.

These environmental justice disparities have reached a crisis level and demand our attention and action.

I've been proud to work over the past two years in partnership with Representative McEachin to put together the comprehensive environmental justice bill before us today. Importantly, this bill has been developed by environmental justice communities themselves, through an inclusive, transparent, community-led process.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to Representative McEachin for his leadership and perseverance on this issue. His deep commitment to grounding these efforts in empathy and understanding, and his insistence on a transparent, participatory public input process driven by impacted EJ communities has been key to crafting meaningful and comprehensive environmental justice legislation.

I also want to acknowledge Representatives DeGette and Barragan from our committee, as well as Representatives Schakowsky (pronounced shuh-KOW-ski), Gomez, Meng and Kilmer for contributing portions of their legislation to the Environmental Justice For All Act, and for their own efforts to develop solutions for EJ communities.

The legislation before us furthers environmental justice objectives in a variety of ways.

The bill includes several provisions to ensure more equitable access to parks and recreational opportunities for underserved communities.

The bill requires federal agencies to provide early and meaningful community involvement opportunities under NEPA when proposing an action affecting an environmental justice community and strengthens tribal input opportunities.

The bill strengthens and restores civil rights protections for communities facing greater environmental hazards on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

It increases transparency, coordination, and accountability from federal agencies when they are carrying out activities affecting environmental justice communities.

Today we will hear from several witnesses who are experts in their fields, and also experts in their lived experiences working with and living in environmental justice communities.

We hope their testimony today will inform our committee on the urgent need to empower communities to protect their natural resources and realize their right to clean water, clean air, and healthy outdoor spaces.

These rights are not being met for far too many communities and doing something about that is what today's hearing is all about.

With that, I now recognize Ranking Member Bishop.